
Mid-Region Council of Governments

2004 Annual Report



Celebrating 35 Years of Serving the Region

A Letter from the MRCOG Board Chair



M. Steven Anaya
Chair, Board of Directors

It is with great pleasure and honor that I have been selected to serve as Chair of the Mid-Region Council of Governments' Board of Directors. The elected officials on the Board not only work diligently for their respective governments and communities, but also work cooperatively to address and find solutions to the complex issues facing our region.

In the coming year, MRCOG will face exciting challenges and opportunities that are truly regional in perspective. The commuter rail project Phase 1, from Belen to Bernalillo, will link the communities in the heart of our region together, while Phase 2 will link the Mid-Region to Santa Fe. The creation of a regional transit district offers the opportunity to plan, implement, and monitor a regional, public, transportation system that meets our region's diverse needs. These initiatives will not only impact the choices available to our citizens for transportation, but, more importantly, will impact the choices available to local, regional and global businesses seeking to expand or locate in our region. Economic development is further strengthened by the workforce development services provided by Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico, and the planning and technical services provided by MRCOG as the designated Economic Development District for the region. Central to our well-being and the future of our communities is the water resource planning that is being coordinated by MRCOG. These regional issues will dominant our work agenda for the next year.

These are daunting challenges indeed, but challenges that we are capable of addressing. I am eager to begin working with my colleagues on the Board and members of our community to support the MRCOG staff so that we can build upon the successes that we have created.

M. Steven Anaya
Chair, Board of Directors

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*Miguel Gomez, Councilor
Martin Heinrich, Councilor
*James Lewis, Chief Administrative Officer
Debbie O'Malley, Councilor

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Albuquerque Public Schools

*Robert Lucero, Board Member

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*A. Terese Ulivarri, Councilor,

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Robert Bell, Councilor

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Wanona Maestas, Trustee

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Deputy Superintendent

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Chair, MRCOG Board of Directors

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City of Rio Rancho

*Jim Owen, Mayor

Rio Rancho Public Schools

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Jack Thomas, Commissioner

Southern Sandoval County Arroyo Flood Control Authority (SSCAFCA)

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Vice Chair, MRCOG Board of Directors
Estefanie Muller, Clerk

Torrance County

*Bob Ayre, County Manager

Valencia County

*Mary Andersen, Commissioner

Village of Willard

**Executive Board*

A Letter from the Executive Director



*Lawrence Rael
MRCOG Executive Director*

Whether we like it or not, the communities in the Middle Rio Grande Valley are now part of a global economy. With advancements in technology and transportation, business leaders can now choose from a wide range of locations, both within the United States and overseas, when looking for opportunities to build or relocate their operations.

In this new environment, cities don't compete against each other for economic opportunity, regions do. Albuquerque isn't competing against Atlanta or Dallas or Mexico City -- we're competing against those regions that have combined their resources and taken a collaborative approach to attracting new employers to their areas.

To survive, this region must do the same. We must organize and collaborate, draw on one another's strengths to stay competitive in today's economy.

The Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG) plays an important role in encouraging the local governments in this region to adopt a cooperative approach to solving the challenges we face. Most elected officials understand that a regional perspective is vital to the future of all our communities, and must be an integral component of policy decisions concerning economic development, land use, transportation, water consumption, and air quality. Every community in this region has a unique identity that is respected, so building consensus on those issues requires that we balance the needs of individual communities with the demands of the region as a whole.

MRCOG provides a neutral, inclusive forum for the type of regional collaboration that such complex issues demand. We bring together local leaders from throughout this area for exactly that purpose: to encourage cooperation on issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries.

Through MRCOG, every government in this region, small or large, has a voice in the discussion of regional issues. Our organization includes mayors, councilors, and commissioners from member governments, as well as tribes, school districts, and other special units of governments that often are left out of the process.

Finding a balance between local autonomy and regional cooperation won't be easy, but it is absolutely essential to the future of every community in this region. I am confident that the members of MRCOG will rise to the occasion and provide the vision and leadership that will help all our communities grow and prosper together.

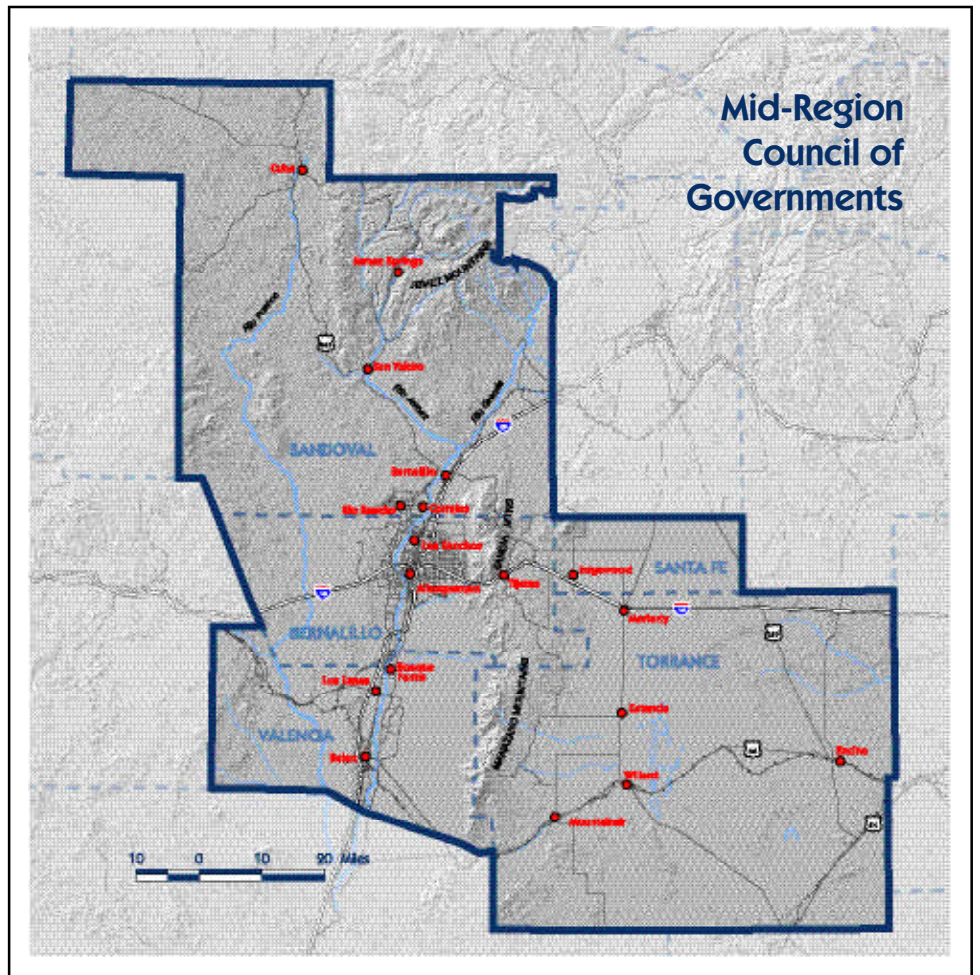
*Lawrence Rael
MRCOG Executive Director*



Torrance County Manager Bob Ayre (above left), former Mayor Howard Calkins of the Village of Cuba (above center), and Bosque Farms Councilor Ginger Eldridge (above right) attend a MRCOG Board meeting. Rio Rancho Mayor Jim Owen (right) chats with Executive Director Lawrence Rael.



Celebrating 35 Years of Serving the Region



Highlights from the 2004 Legislative Session

Thanks to the efforts and support of the legislators in our region, the 2004 session was a successful one for MRCOG. The Legislature acted on many of the issues identified by the MRCOG Board of Directors as priorities for local governments in this region. The Legislature increased its annual appropriation for MRCOG and each of the state's other planning and development districts by \$21,400 and appropriated \$100,000 in new capital outlay funding to help MRCOG acquire permanent office space.

The Legislature voted to give local governments new gross receipts tax authority to fund regional transit districts (RTDs). Revenue from that local-option tax can be used to fund passenger rail and other local transit services provided by RTDs such as the one being created by MRCOG in this region and others around the state (see Pages 4 and 8). The Legislature also expanded county gross receipts tax authority and voted to repeal the gross receipts tax on food and most medical services. The food and medical services tax cut will go into effect January 1, 2005, and includes a "hold harmless" provision to compensate local governments for lost tax revenue. ■

A Letter from Governor Richardson

The Middle Rio Grande region is an important part of New Mexico's economic engine – a veritable beehive of jobs, education, work force training, agriculture, federal investment, and technology. As a region, the Middle Rio Grande must succeed for New Mexico's economy to grow and for New Mexico's families to prosper.

There are several areas in which regional cooperation has been improving, to everyone's benefit.



Governor Bill Richardson enjoys the ride on a demonstration commuter rail car from the Alvarado Center in Albuquerque to the Town of Bernalillo following a news conference this spring for the commuter rail project (photo courtesy of D. Hernandez).

The first is transportation. The jurisdictions responsible for providing transportation infrastructure, from roads to buses to bike and walking trails, have been working together ever more successfully. One example is the growing interest in a regional transit district, which started with broad support from government and business leaders – as well as environmentalists – several years ago.

Now the multiple jurisdictions are working together – cities, counties, villages, and pueblos – to support the proposal for commuter rail through the region. The commuter rail project from Belen to Bernalillo will offer new transportation choice and efficiency for people throughout the area.

My intention is that the commuter rail project will also anchor some great new economic development around the train stations up and down the line. And eventually it is going to provide a needed new connection to Santa Fe and northern New Mexico (which are also doing good work to improve regional transit planning).

Another important area in which regional cooperation is growing is water management, again with the direct assistance of the Mid-Region Council of Governments (MRCOG). What issue poses greater economic and environmental importance for the Middle Rio Grande than its water management? What issue, left unaddressed, will have greater impact on the lifestyle of the region's population?

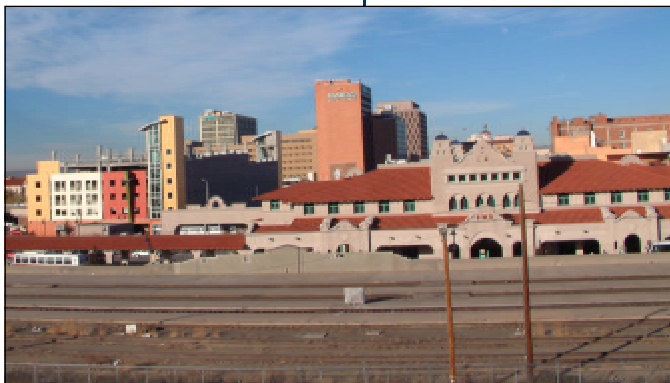
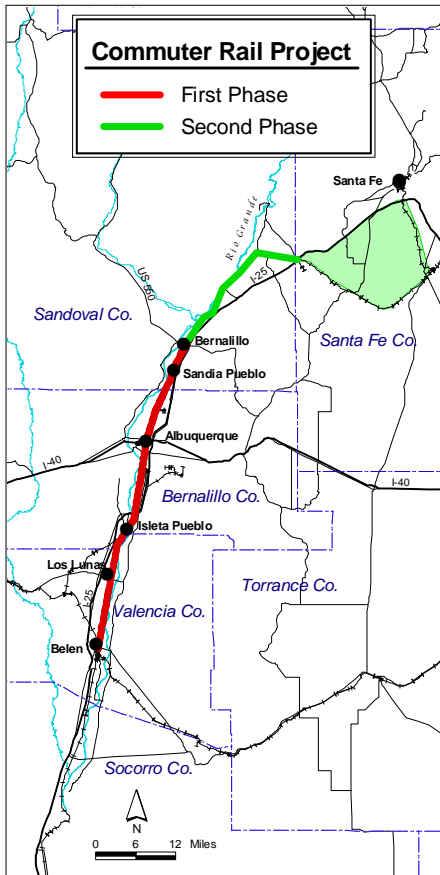
MRCOG can play an important role in bringing local governments together around a regional vision for other issues such as affordable housing and job creation. A regional approach can benefit everyone through lower costs and greater opportunities.

I am excited and pleased to see the region pulling together to address local water issues. There will always be differences, but everyone – industry, agriculture, and everyday residents – needs to work together for a bright future.

I am pleased to see the leadership, regional wisdom and knowledge, and staff excellence that the MRCOG brings to this important part of New Mexico. I continue to look forward to working with MRCOG and its constituent governments to improve economic opportunity and the quality of life in the Middle Rio Grande.

Governor Bill Richardson

Pursuing Options for Growth and Prosperity



The Alvarado Center (above) will serve as the main downtown Albuquerque station for commuter rail.

Commuter Rail -

from the past to the future

Identifying Opportunities

In August of 2003, Governor Bill Richardson announced that one of the priorities of his administration was the implementation of Commuter Rail between Belen and Santa Fe. During the 2003 Special Session, the Legislature passed Governor Richardson's Investment Partnership (GRIP) transportation funding package that included funding for passenger rail service along the I-25 corridor. MRCOG will partner with the New Mexico Department of Transportation in implementing the service. This project has been divided into two phases; Phase 1 from Belen to Bernalillo, and Phase 2 from Bernalillo to Santa Fe (see map at left). The primary focus over the last eight months has been on the first phase.

Many of us cross the railroad tracks every day without realizing the tremendous potential the existing rail line still holds for economic development. That track represents an underutilized, valuable asset in the heart of our communities that can once again stimulate our local economy. While the era of heavy freight rail expansion is past, passenger rail is now enjoying a renaissance across the United States. New Mexico is perfectly situated to join

regions such as Denver, Dallas, and Salt Lake City in using passenger rail service to drive local economic development. Since Governor Richardson's announcement, MRCOG in cooperation with the New Mexico Department of Transportation has advanced the project on several fronts.

Securing the Rail Line

MRCOG has been negotiating with the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway (BNSF) to identify the capital improvements that are necessary to provide safe and fast service between Belen and Bernalillo (Phase 1). This includes track improvements, crossing improvements, and train signal improvements. MRCOG and BNSF are also in the process of negotiating an operating agreement which will provide MRCOG with the rights to operate commuter rail service on this portion of the line. The negotiations with BNSF have been very productive, but it does take time to identify all the specific requirements and responsibilities. MRCOG anticipates that final agreements will be completed sometime in August or September of this year.

Station Planning

MRCOG has also been working with local governments in the region to identify and develop commuter rail stations along the route. Sites have been identified in Belen, Los Lunas, north and south Bernalillo County, Sandia Pueblo, and Bernalillo. The Alvarado Transportation Center will serve as the main downtown Albuquerque station. Each of these sites is being evaluated for environmental issues, space requirements and access. The next steps in this process include site planning, property acquisition, design and then construction. The construction of station platforms and access is scheduled to begin in the winter of 2004-2005.



MRCOG staff has looked at various “rolling stock” for acquisition for commuter rail. This locomotive is utilized in Chicago (left). Executive Director Lawrence Rael (below) examines a passenger car in Philadelphia.

Equipment

Another important piece of implementation is the acquisition of “rolling stock” or train sets for the commuter rail service. MRCOG has investigated a number of options in this area. While there appear to be some opportunities to acquire used locomotives that are in relatively good shape, acquiring the cars has been a little more challenging. MRCOG has released an RFP that includes a specification for new commuter rail cars. This RFP will result in the acquisition of new cars for the service. If the lead time of constructing these cars is beyond the scheduled service start up time frame (fall of 2005) MRCOG will pursue opportunities to lease used equipment.

Passenger Service

MRCOG has also been working on service alternatives for the corridor. Likely scenarios include running three trains from the south (Belen) and two trains from the north (Bernalillo) in the morning and reversing these movements in the afternoon. It is likely that one mid-day run (originating in Albuquerque and returning to Albuquerque) will also occur. Other service design options include a late evening train, weekend, and special events service. An important aspect of the service design is evaluating local connections to transit, providing new pulse bus service, and other types of transportation services to insure that the market for the commuter rail service is maximized to the degree possible. Many details of the service design still need to be worked out, including actual time tables, fare structures, and local connections.



Funding

Since the beginning of the year, the Governor, the Legislature, and the New Mexico Transportation Commission have committed \$75 million in state funding to cover the costs of this first phase. That contribution represents one of the very first investments of state funds in a public transportation system in New Mexico and constitutes a tremendous investment in the economic future of this state.

This year, the Legislature voted to give local governments authority to ask voters to approve additional tax revenue that can be used for the operating costs of passenger rail and other transit projects. And while the total capital costs for commuter rail may seem high at \$75 million, it’s clearly a good investment when you consider that rebuilding one interchange at Coors and I-40 is expected to cost at least \$80 million.

Benefits

In our efforts to generate economic development, we will be in a stronger position to attract new businesses if we can draw on the combined resources of our communities. In today’s global environment, cities don’t compete for economic development opportunities; regions do. Our local governments must organize and collaborate for economic development and a safe, efficient transportation infrastructure/network is a fundamental building block in that effort.

Commuter rail will link our communities, pool our human resources, and preserve our great quality of life by giving people more options for work and play. And like the trains that first ran through New Mexico in the 1800s, passenger rail will kick off a new era of growth and prosperity in our great state. ■

Commuter rail offers opportunities for economic development and the potential to create vibrant pedestrian-friendly streetscapes.



Making the Connection for New Mexico's Workforce

One-Stop Career Shops

Bernalillo County

Model One-Stop
501 Mountain Rd. NE
Albuquerque, NM 87102
505-823-6601

Hispano Chamber of Commerce
1309 4th St. SW, Ste. D
Albuquerque, NM 87102
505-247-8700

Sandoval County

2418 Southern Blvd., Ste. E
Rio Rancho, NM 87124
505-994-1900

Torrance County

Moriarty Chamber of Commerce
777 Old Route 66
Moriarty, NM 87035
505-832-6774

Valencia County

UNM Valencia Campus
280 La Entrada Rd., Rooms 210 & 222
Los Lunas, NM 87031
505-925-8959



New Contracts Approved for One-Stop and Youth Services

Last year, the MRCOG was selected as the Administrative Entity for the Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico (WCCNM). Workforce Connection is a workforce development program under the provisions of the Federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) - the latest in a series of programs aimed at helping American workers find jobs that can meet their economic needs.

Congratulations to Bob Davey of Valley Improvement Association who assumed the leadership position as Chairman of the WCCNM Board effective July 1, 2004. Other newly elected officers include John Sapien, Chair-Elect and Mike Swisher, Treasurer. This June also marked the conclusion of Steve Anaya's term as Chairman. Thank you, Steve, for your commitment and leadership of WCCNM!

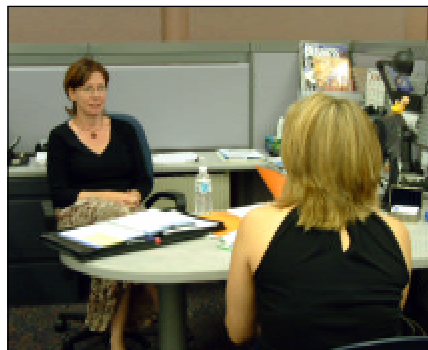
WCCNM has worked with business leaders, contractors and service providers to serve its customers. Participants have had available a broad range of employability skills services including workplace skills, effective communication, time management, computer literacy, and other essential skills identified by employers. Partnerships exist throughout the community, including those the organization has with the University of New Mexico, Manpower, Albuquerque Economic Development, CareerWorks, TeamWorks, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Albuquerque Technical Vocational Institute and the New Mexico Business Roundtable. Other partner agencies include Catholic Charities, individual job referrals, Salvation Army and the New Mexico Human Services Department.

In June, Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico (WCCNM) approved two major Workforce Investment Act (WIA) contracts: one for the One-Stop adult and dislocated worker operator, and another for the youth services provider.

The WCCNM selected the New Mexico Department of Labor as its One-Stop operator. Strengths of the proposal included co-location of the partners and services to outlying and rural areas. The Department proposed to use a vehicle to service customers in the outlying areas, in addition to staffing at each of the county office One-Stop locations. The New Mexico Department of Labor will assume operations and management of the One-Stop Centers on July 1.

In addition, WCCNM selected Youth Development, Inc. (YDI) as the Youth provider. YDI proposed to deliver services to youth through each of the One-Stop locations. YDI has long experience working with young people throughout the region, and will also assume operations and management of the youth program.

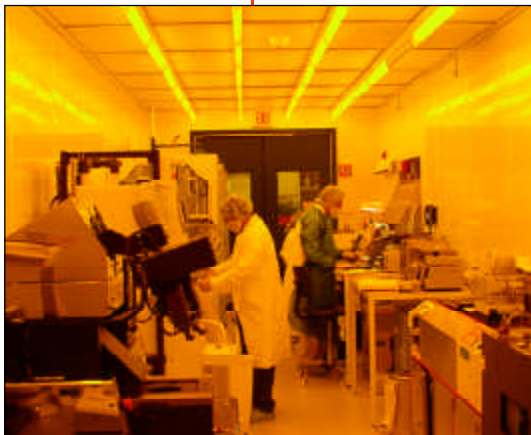
Both agencies will establish a plan for meeting performance benchmarks based upon the Scope of Services outlined in their proposals, and WCCNM will evaluate the Contractor's ability to meet these benchmarks on a monthly basis. Congratulations to the New Mexico Department of Labor and Youth Development, Inc.! ■



A Summer Work Academy participant (far left) works with a program mentor at her worksite with the Sandoval County Public Health Department. The adult and dislocated worker One-Stop operator is the New Mexico Department of Labor (left).

Promoting our Region through Policy and Planning

Workers and students are able to learn job skills and train in the cleanroom at the University of New Mexico's Manufacturing Training and Technology Center (photo courtesy of UNM MTTC).



Economic Development Planning Grant Awarded

As the designated Economic Development District for the region, MRCOG provides technical and planning assistance to entities seeking funds from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA).

MRCOG recently received a three-year, \$150,000 planning grant from EDA to continue its economic development planning program. The award enables MRCOG to help strengthen the capacity of local governments to maximize their economic development potential.

Moving from an annual award to a three-year cycle gives MRCOG better footing to strengthen the local economy through long-range planning. MRCOG has been a designated Economic Development District since 1973, emphasizing distressed or underserved areas where community infrastructure improvements can support the local economy and help attract new jobs.

For example, staff have been working with several entities in the region applying for 2005 funding from EDA (see project listing in sidebar). The grant applications submitted cover a host of job-creating activities from small-business incubators to high-tech training centers. EDA will announce successful programs in October 2004. ■

EDA Projects 2004-2005

- ✓ Sandia Science and Technology Park and Technology Ventures Corporation will be developing a Point of Presence telecommunications center for higher speed data communications.
- ✓ The University of New Mexico's Manufacturing Training and Technology Center Cleanroom Project will provide a venue for capacity building in the semiconductor and microsystems arena.
- ✓ Lovelace Respiratory Research Institute proposes to upgrade its research facility to become competitive in the pharmaceutical and biomedical arena.
- ✓ The Hispano Chamber of Commerce eMercadoNM seeks to increase the economic potential of New Mexico businesses through a web-based business development program.
- ✓ WESST Corp, an economic development organization serving a range of clients in the Albuquerque area, proposes to build a business incubator in an area ripe for downtown revitalization.

Fostering Entrepreneurship with Town of Bernalillo and Zia Pueblo

Since everyone is talking about entrepreneurship, what better time to work with Zia Pueblo to help provide a venue for Tribal entrepreneurs? MRCOG, in conjunction with the Town of Bernalillo, Zia Pueblo, and Governor Richardson's Sun Symbol Task Force, is helping to facilitate the development of a 19.5-acre property in Bernalillo owned by Zia Pueblo. All parties involved want the property developed in a way that achieves the highest and best use of the land, derives income for the Tribe, and gross receipts for the Town of Bernalillo.

Earlier this year, the State committed \$60,000 to the project for a feasibility study to determine the highest and best use of the land.

Zia Pueblo Governor Peter Pino, Mayor Charles Aguilar, and administrative staff of the Town of Bernalillo have actively participated in this project. MRCOG is serving to coordinate all parties to achieve their economic development goals.

Fostering entrepreneurship in New Mexico was one of the chief recommendations of the Central New Mexico Competitiveness Summit, held in September of last year. This endeavor exemplifies MRCOG's commitment to strengthening the regional economy. ■

Public Transportation Planning Expands in the Region

Another Step Closer to a Regional Transit District

A Regional Transit District (RTD) in the Mid-Region area may soon be formed! Ever since the New Mexico legislature approved the Regional Transit District Act, MRCOG Executive Director Lawrence Rael has been discussing with member governments possible organizational structures for an RTD. This area's unique combination of major city, mid-size city, small urban towns, and rural villages creates a challenge to organizationally structuring a regional transit entity that will address the public transit needs of this diverse area.

"We've really worked to develop a very candid and honest discussion about forming a Regional Transit District," says Mr. Rael. "What we've come up with is a proposal based on a structure that provides strong local input and oversight."

The next step is for the Executive Director and MRCOG staff to present this proposal to the various governing bodies at work sessions - forums for the presentation of information and for addressing questions.

Communities that are interested in joining the RTD will publish a public meeting notice 10 days prior to the meeting, listen to public comment, and conduct a vote. When two or more entities approve the RTD contract and bylaws, MRCOG will then request that the New Mexico Transportation Commission certify that an RTD has been formed in this area.

"How will RTDs be funded?" is a question asked by everyone. This past legislative session, State Representative Gail Beam introduced legislation that permits a local option vote to increase the gross receipts tax rate up to ½ % to provide funding for regional transit districts. This legislation was approved by state legislators and the governor. Now RTD members have another option for funding their chosen level of public transportation services. ■

United We Ride - Coming Soon to Valencia County

"United We Ride", a joint federal and state government effort to improve coordination of publicly financed transportation services, is coming to Valencia County. The New Mexico Departments of Transportation and Human Services, as required by New Mexico House Bill 412, identified Valencia County as a rural-urban area for a *United We Ride* pilot project. The Valencia County geographic area was selected due to its rural-urban characteristics, its history of pioneering innovative efforts, and its current endeavors at developing a coordinated transportation system in the county. The departments welcomed the actions of Valencia County Commissioner Mary Anderson and City of Belen Councilor A. Terese Ulivarri at organizing informal meetings to discuss how a coordinated system within Valencia County could be structured.

Federal, state, and local governments recognize that transportation is a basic need and each of these governments provide funding for this need; for example, there are 62 federal programs that fund transportation services. The challenge facing the funding agencies, the transportation providers, and the recipients of these services, is to maintain service quality while improving funding efficiencies. It is recognized that the key elements of a successful project in Valencia County will be the starting points for similar projects in other New Mexico counties.

The Mid-Region Council of Governments is working with the Department of Transportation, as the designated state lead agency, and the governmental entities within Valencia County to organize and carry-out the *United We Ride* work effort. The initial step was to

Census Transportation Data Reveals Our Transportation Patterns and Modes

The sidebar at right lists some of the travel information that is available based on the 2000 US Census. This is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of new data related to journey-to-work trips available at MRCOG. More information, such as travel times, mode splits, vehicle ownership, and commutes by minority and income status, are currently being analyzed by various geographic levels.

The Census Transportation Planning Package (CTPP) is a joint effort between the Federal Highway Administration, the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, the Federal Transit Administration, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, and the Census Bureau. It is a particularly valuable data source because it is the only census product that provides data based on home-to-work “flows”, which allows us to look at characteristics associated with specific trip origins and destinations. This allows us to determine, for example, mean travel times from Edgewood to downtown Albuquerque, or the incomes of people who commute from Sandoval County to Sandia National Laboratories. It is also the only census product that summarizes data by transportation analysis zone, which is helpful when we need data for small geographic areas.

As the largest survey of transportation data available for the region, the CTPP is a reliable dataset for transportation planners. MRCOG is processing this important dataset for several uses, including commuter rail planning and projections, bus and/or light rail route planning, and for calibrating and improving the accuracy of our travel demand model. It will also be important in assessing travel patterns in order to plan for road improvements and new construction. Because the data are available for all modes, MRCOG is also able to analyze bicycle and walk commutes, which will be a beneficial addition to current planning efforts for non-motorized travel. ■

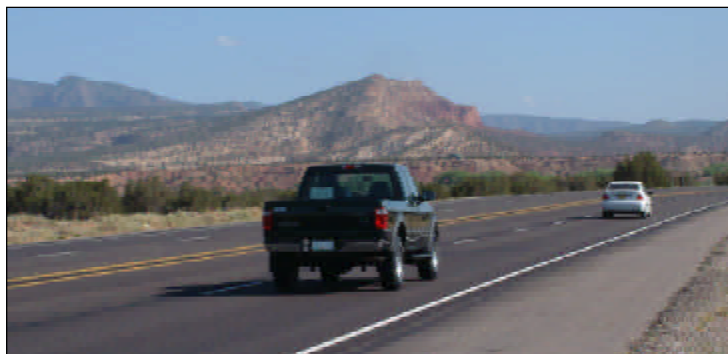
request adoption of a supporting resolution from the governing bodies of each entity. The City of Belen, Village of Bosque Farms, County of Valencia, and the Village of Los Lunas have each approved the resolution, and appointed a member to the oversight committee.

The next step is to develop a “needs analysis” for the county. A meeting with current users and potential users of public transportation services, service providers, and staff from the governmental entities is being scheduled to accomplish this task. ■

Did you know . . . ?

- ▶ More than half of Sandoval County’s workforce commutes to Bernalillo County.
- ▶ Three out of every four workers living in Los Lunas work outside of the Village.
- ▶ 15% of Albuquerque’s workers commute elsewhere, with about 6,500 headed for Rio Rancho and 1,600 to the City of Santa Fe.
- ▶ 55% of Belen’s workers commute elsewhere, of which 21% commute to Albuquerque and 10% to Los Lunas.
- ▶ 88% of Rio Rancho’s working population who commute to Albuquerque drive alone.
- ▶ More than a third of Albuquerque’s workers who commute to Santa Fe City carpool to work.
- ▶ Workers from within the region who commute to Santa Fe are more likely to be below the poverty level than commuters remaining within the region.

US 550 brings commuters to the urban area from northwestern Sandoval County.



Conserving Our Land, Our Heritage, and Our Resources

Water Conservation Assistance Funded

MRCOG has been granted funding from the State Natural Resources Trustee, Mr. Jim Baca, to assist several of the smaller municipalities in the Middle Rio Grande Valley to draft and implement water conservation programs and ordinances. MRCOG will provide technical and staff assistance in developing water management strategies for municipal water systems, and will provide for legal services that may be required in drafting specific ordinance language. With MRCOG's 30 years experience in working with local governments and other water users in the Rio Grande corridor, this project has the potential to become a model for water conservation ordinances and programs in other small municipalities throughout New Mexico. ■

Agribusiness in the Middle Rio Grande Valley Focus of Task Force

The Mid-Region Council of Governments' Agribusiness Task Force was established to increase the economic viability of the Middle Rio Grande region's agricultural sector, and to foster coordination and communication among local agricultural stakeholders. The Middle Rio Grande region contains many small farms that produce a variety of important agricultural products for the largest urban area in New Mexico and have the potential to serve a much larger market.

The Task Force seeks to improve the region's agricultural sector by achieving the following objectives:

- increasing opportunities for agriculture-related revenues
- identifying markets for locally-grown agricultural products
- promoting more efficient irrigation methods
- increasing public awareness of the local agricultural economy
- developing better methods to protect and preserve agricultural land

The Task Force meets monthly to discuss a variety of agriculture-related topics, from preserving agricultural land and using local products in local restaurants to practicing water conservation and identifying the role of local farmers markets. Recently it applied for funding to create a regional information database that quantifies the type, location, and economic impact of agricultural activities, and to inventory the producers, suppliers, and buyers of agricultural products in the Middle Rio Grande region.

Task Force members represent a broad cross-section of stakeholders from the agribusiness sector including growers, county extension agents, processors, restaurants, grocery stores, scientists, high tech companies, and representatives from government agencies with expertise in water, organic commodities, economic development, and land use management. Ultimately, the Task Force sees a regional networking structure for agriculture-related activities leading to a more viable agricultural economy in the Middle Rio Grande Valley. ■



The Agribusiness Task Force held a field trip in July at the Los Poblanos Lavender Field Demonstration Project in Los Ranchos de Albuquerque (above and left).

Comprehensive Planning is an On-going Effort



MRCOG assisted the Village of Cuba with comprehensive land use planning. Shown above is the Village fire station.

Regional Water Plan Completed

The Middle Rio Grande Regional Water Plan was completed in December 2003 following an extensive research and development process. Since the establishment of the Middle Rio Grande Water Resources Board in 1998, MRCOG has been working with the Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly, a non-profit corporation, to assess the regional water supply, project future water demand, evaluate water management strategies, and recommend specific actions to seek a balance between supply and demand. Significant funding for this planning program was obtained through the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission and through cash contributions from local governments.

In order to meet the water needs of the future, the Regional Water Plan presents 43 water management actions that are intended to increase the efficiency of water consumption, conserve and reuse existing resources, and preserve the region's water quality. Local governments and other water management agencies are being encouraged to select and implement the most effective actions to benefit the overall region. Virtually all of the local governments and special purpose agencies in the region have adopted resolutions accepting this Regional Water Plan. Efforts are currently underway to carry out the implementation phase of the Plan as funding and other support is obtained. ■

MRCOG continues to provide comprehensive planning and technical assistance to local governments throughout the region. Planning activities are carried out at both the regional and local community levels. Over the past year, regional activities included:

- long-range land use planning and development
- water resource development
- multi-modal transportation systems planning
- economic development

MRCOG's community planning services included preparation of comprehensive plans for the Town of Mountainair and the Village of Cuba, infrastructure planning and programming, analysis of municipal annexation, land use regulation and management, community services and facilities planning, strategic economic development planning, and intergovernmental or multi-jurisdictional coordination.

MRCOG provides professional planning assistance and technical services to member governments within the multi-county planning district on an individual request basis, often functioning as an extension of a local government's staff. ■

Digital Aerial Imagery Clearly Shows Our Use of the Land

Digital orthoimagery is widely used as a mapping base for geographic information technology applications. This is digital aerial photography where distortions caused by camera lens, the camera's angle, and relief displacement are removed. The resulting imagery can be used like a map and distances and angles can be measured directly.



This year, MRCOG coordinated a cooperative project to obtain new orthoimagery for much of the region, including Bernalillo County, central Valencia County, southern Santa Fe County, and northwest Tarrant County. The imagery was obtained in March and June using large-format digital camera technology. A transition to digital sensors from conventional film-based systems is just beginning in the industry, and the advantages include better image quality and improved product-generation times. MRCOG contracted with local engineering firm Bohannon-Huston, Inc. for the acquisition and production of the high resolution color imagery and began receiving orthoimagery only 90 days after photo acquisition.

Orthoimagery cooperators include Bernalillo County, the City of Albuquerque, NM Department of Transportation, Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo Flood Control Authority, the Village of Los Lunas, Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, Isleta Pueblo, and Valley Improvement Association. In addition, the US Geological Survey, National Mapping Center, Denver, provided additional funding with a cooperative agreement award for geospatial data acquisition.

Up-to-date imagery for use in property assessment, emergency management, land use analysis, engineering or site planning is critical. MRCOG is already gearing up for a region-wide cooperative effort to obtain new digital orthoimagery again in 2006 and for similar efforts every two years following that date. ■

Transportation Planning is Much More Than Roadways

Pedestrian Issues Addressed in Workshop Series

In June 2003, the National Center for Bicycling and Walking (NCBW) issued a call for proposals to host a series of eight “Walkable Community Workshops” (WCW). The Mid-Region Council of Governments responded to that call and was one of the twelve urban areas selected to participate in the 2004 WCW program.

professionals in the fields of planning, engineering, law enforcement, and education. WCW trainers were experienced professionals and practitioners with diverse backgrounds and fields of work including planning, transportation engineering, public health, pedestrian policy, and program development. Trainers and participants identified opportunities to make our community more “walkable”.



Albuquerque Public Schools' Zia Elementary School (above) was one of the workshop sites.

Eight workshops were scheduled during the week of March 29 through April 2, 2004. Participating agencies and community groups included: Bernalillo County Public Works Department and Bernalillo County Parks & Recreation Department; City of Albuquerque Transportation Division/Department of Municipal Development; City of Rio Rancho Public Works Department; Village of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque; City of Belen; New Mexico Department of Transportation-District 3, and WALK Albuquerque.

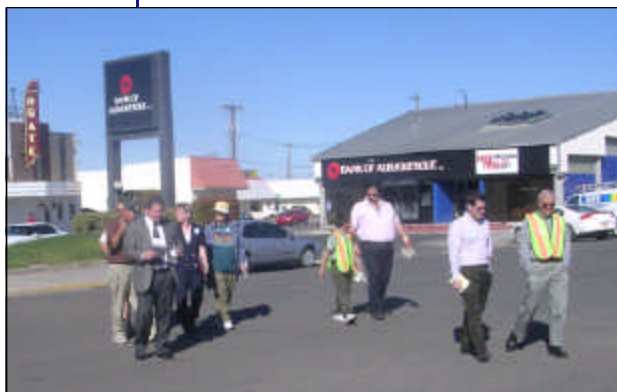
The workshops were four-hour events for elected officials, citizens, and

MRCOG staff worked closely with the local coordinator from each of the hosting government agencies and community groups. The participation of the local coordinator was critical to the success of the events. MRCOG is now working with the local coordinators to identify next steps that are unique to their community needs for on-going follow-up.

Some of the follow-up steps identified include technical assistance, training opportunities, and information support. Materials and information already available via transportation and other websites is being provided to the local agencies. In addition, MRCOG is developing a new page on its own website that focuses on bicycle and pedestrian issues with links to other sites. This page will have a photo library with examples of walking strategies from our community as well as from other locales. It will also include slide presentations related to walking issues, a list of pedestrian publications, links to bike and pedestrian organizations and institutions, and information on what is occurring in the region related to bike and pedestrian matters.

MRCOG will continue pursuing opportunities to bring more technical assistance to the region in partnership with local stakeholders. Bringing the WCW to this region constitutes a step toward achieving a more walkable and physically active community, in which the MRCOG definitely wants to play an active part. ■

Becker Avenue in Belen was the location of a workshop focusing on pedestrian issues and enhancing downtown.



MRCOG and NMDOT Work Together on the Transportation Improvement Process

In 2003, MRCOG hired Mr. Jack Lord as liaison with the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) to improve overall coordination between the NMDOT General Office, District 3, and the MRCOG. One of his major tasks has been to work toward improving the process for developing and amending the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

For the last several years, the NMDOT has developed an annual STIP. This in turn requires the metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and Districts to maintain an annual development cycle for metropolitan and rural TIPs. In an effort to create a more efficient system to serve regional and statewide needs, the NMDOT approved a proposal to adopt a framework for a two-year TIP/STIP development cycle and a quarterly amendment process that would allow for modifications during the two-year period. The liaison worked with the NMDOT Statewide Planning Bureau Chief to establish a statewide TIP/STIP Policies and Procedures Review Committee to define and accomplish the transition to the two-year process.

The committee is composed of representatives from the NMDOT, all five of the New Mexico MPOs, the state's Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs), and other

stakeholders. The Committee has met monthly since January 2004 and has put together a development and amendment time line and recommendations for general TIP/STIP issues and amendments. The recommendations identify such items as agency responsibilities, differentiation between amendments and administrative adjustments, and amendment criteria.

The Committee's work is expected to be finished late this summer. Once finalized, the recommendations will be presented to the NMDOT administration and to the State Transportation Commission, and to the various MPO and RPO policy committees. MRCOG anticipates that the process will be tested during fall 2004 and spring 2005 when the FY 2006-2011 TIPs and STIP will be developed. Once the development process is finished and the new STIP is approved, the Process Review Committee will reconvene to refine the process, if necessary, and formally propose adoption as State Transportation Commission policy. ■



The TIP/STIP Policies and Procedures Review Committee (above) has held meetings over the past seven months. MRCOG is responsible for the transportation planning process for the Regional Planning Organization outside of the urbanized area. A project at the intersection of US 60 and NM 55 in Mountainair (left) for bridge, bike and pedestrian improvements is programmed in the current STIP.

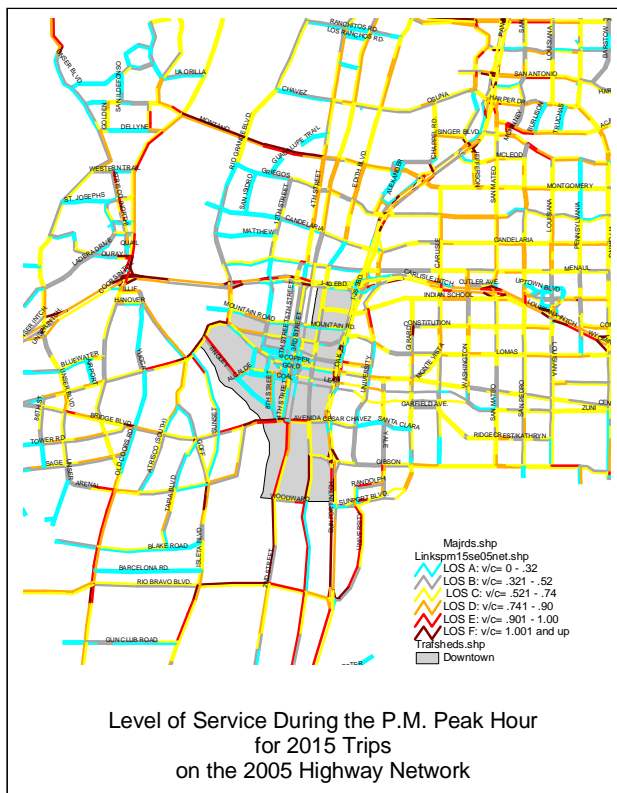
Intelligent Transportation System Implementation Plan Adopted

The Metropolitan Transportation Board adopted the Metropolitan Area Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Implementation Plan at their regular meeting on June 24, 2004. The Board's adoption of the ITS Plan is the culmination of two years work undertaken by the MRCOG and regional stakeholder partners to identify and prioritize ITS projects that will increase the efficiency of the region's transportation system.

Intelligent Transportation Systems are advanced communications, computing technologies, and related strategies applied to the surface transportation system. These advanced tools help improve mobility by clearing accidents faster, coordinating traffic signals so that fewer cars have to stop, providing up-to-the-minute information to travelers about current traffic conditions, and improving the safety and reliability of buses.

The Metropolitan Area ITS Implementation Plan is staged in two phases of deployment to provide improved traffic signal coordination, collection of better traffic and weather data, more and better traffic and weather information to travelers, and tools to help agencies better manage traffic and respond to incidents. The MRCOG will be working with its member agencies to identify and program funds to implement ITS projects throughout the region. ■

Technical Support Addresses Traffic Impact Fees



MRCOG provides regional travel modeling services to its member governments. The model helps in forecasting travel and traffic volumes on the major roadways within the modeling area, which includes all of Bernalillo County, central Valencia County, and portions of Sandoval, Torrance, and Santa Fe Counties. Recent examples of technical assistance include the analyses of alternatives to the Paseo del Norte western extension and the Coors Blvd/I-40 Interchange project design alternatives.

MRCOG is also providing support services for the City of Albuquerque in their development of traffic impact fees. The map at left is one example of the type of information MRCOG is providing for the City using the regional transportation model.

The map shows the expected level of service that would occur if the projected 2015 level of population and employment had to travel on the highway network expected to be available in 2005. The best level of service (LOS) is LOS-A, where travel is easy and drivers experience essentially no delay due to congestion. From LOS-B through LOS-E, the levels of service gradually deteriorate, with driving comfort diminishing, lane changing becoming progressively more difficult, and delays at traffic signals increasing. Finally, at LOS-F, conditions are severely congested, with stop-and-go traffic and long queues waiting through to the next green light at traffic signals. Marginally better than LOS-F is LOS-E, where driver discomfort is high, but traffic can flow steadily, although slowly. ■

Jurisdictions Cooperate in Project Funding and Design

Two major interstate projects in the metro area have showcased the region's ability to come together to solve regional issues. These are the reconstruction projects at Louisiana/I-40 and Coors/I-40. In both cases, local and state jurisdictions worked together to identify the funding necessary to make these projects possible and to provide a quality project.

In the case of Louisiana/I-40, the City of Albuquerque asked the Metropolitan Transportation Board (MTB) to move substantial Federal dollars that had been identified for City projects to the Louisiana project. In addition, the

NMDOT provided Congestion Mitigation funds, that were eligible to be used statewide, for specific elements of the project that reduced congestion. City Arts funds were also provided towards the public art element for this project, which is still under development. Together, the City and NMDOT are in the process of completing a project that will provide much-needed relief and a more attractive interstate entrance to the Uptown area.

In the case of Coors/I-40, the City of Albuquerque, Bernalillo County, and the City of Rio Rancho all asked the MTB to reprogram Federal dollars from their projects in order to provide the funds

needed to fully fund this reconstruction project. These dollars supplemented Governor Richardson's Investment Partnership (GRIP) monies provided by the State Legislature and enabled the NMDOT engineers to include critical elements. The NMDOT has worked closely with the neighborhoods and the local jurisdictions to develop a project that will include important pedestrian and bicycle facilities as well as landscaping that reflects the concepts of the Interstate Corridor Enhancement Plan. The NMDOT and the local jurisdictions are to be congratulated in the way they came together in the MRCOG process to make this happen. ■

The yucca sculpture (shown at right) on I-40 near Tramway Blvd. was created by California artist Gordon Huether as part of the State's "Cultural Corridors" public art program and funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation and Albuquerque's "One Percent for the Arts" program. The artist used salvaged aluminum fuel tanks from military aircraft.

Flexibility in Planning Allows State and Federal Money to Flow

In late April, the Metropolitan Transportation Board voted to amend the 2025 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) for the urban area to make it possible to fund local projects with money from Governor Richardson's Investment Partnership (GRIP) and to allow projects that recently received Federal Special Appropriations to move forward in the Plan. The support of New Mexico's Congressional delegation has been instrumental in obtaining federal appropriations for several transportation projects. Senators Jeff Bingaman and Pete Domenici, and Representative Heather Wilson have worked with MRCOG to ensure that federal transportation funding matches this region's needs. The new funds made it possible to complete some critical projects sooner than had been expected and to initiate other new projects (see sidebar).

The 2025 MTP covers the period from 2003 to 2025. It includes projects ranging from walkways to bicycle trails and from interchange reconstruction to new roadway lanes. It was developed using the most up-to-date information available at the time regarding transportation needs, potential solutions, and available funding.



As the metropolitan planning organization for the urban area, MRCOG is responsible for developing the MTP for the Albuquerque metropolitan area. Local elected officials, technical staff and the public worked together to prepare the 2025 MTP, which was approved by the Metropolitan Transportation Board in May 2003.

The mission of the 2025 MTP is to strive to integrate "transit, pedestrian, bicycling, and motor vehicle modes of travel by increasing accessibility and mobility options for people and goods..." This long range objective remains. However, a flexible planning process adjusts plans and programs to meet unexpected events and opportunities, while always keeping the long range objective firmly in view. In this particular instance, approval of GRIP and the additional Federal funds presented the urban area with the opportunity to move forward more quickly than anticipated on projects that support the 2025 MTP objectives. The Amendment modified the projects and timeframes to reflect this new financial environment. ■



A model of the new I-40/Louisiana Boulevard interchange (above) was prepared for the City of Albuquerque by artist Tom Waldron with landscape and aesthetic enhancements by Morrow Reardon Wilkinson and Miller Ltd. and architect Robert Peters (photo courtesy of Tom Waldron).

"We are excited about the opportunities that the GRIP and new Federal funding is providing to get these projects done sooner than we expected," said Lawrence Rael, MRCOG Executive Director. "This amendment is an important step to making these projects happen."

Projects Receiving New Funding Under GRIP and Federal Special Appropriations

- ✓ I-25, Tramway to Bernalillo, reconstruction & additional lanes
- ✓ I-40, Carlisle to Juan Tabo, reconstruction & auxiliary lanes
- ✓ I-40/Coors interchange reconstruction
- ✓ I-40, Carnuel to Sedillo reconstruction
- ✓ Paseo del Volcan, Unser to Iris, two new lanes
- ✓ Commuter rail between Belen and Bernalillo
- ✓ Analysis of the transportation needs on the Westside
- ✓ Coors, I-25 to Central, reconstruction
- ✓ I-40, Canoncito to Rio Puerco, reconstruction
- ✓ I-40, Central to Coors, reconstruction, additional lanes, and two-way frontage roads

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What's in our future . . .



The building shown above at 809 Copper NW in downtown Albuquerque and the attached annex (right) will be the future home of the Mid-Region Council of Governments.





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